

## **Summary**

### **Consolidation Task Force Meeting Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind**

July 31, 2003

Walker Upper Elementary School  
Charlottesville

**Present:** Martha Adams (for Julie Stanley), Nancy Armstrong, Mary-Margaret Cash, Doug Cox (Jo Lynne DeMary), Scott Goodman (chair), Emmett Hanger, Jr., Ronald Lanier, Glen Slonneger, Lisa Surber, Malinda Washington (for Darlene White), and David Young. DOE staff: Karen Trump. Facilitators: Judy Burtner and Kathryn Burruss.

**Statement of Purpose:** Develop a plan of implementation for consolidating services for the deaf and/or blind and multi-disabled students served by Virginia's two schools for these students.

#### **Objectives**

1. Receive public comment
2. Receive and discuss background information and data
3. Receive update on public involvement activities: Web mailbox, focus groups
4. Receive additional suggested options and make a decision regarding their incorporation into the existing list of options
5. Discuss the need for possible criteria for decision-making
6. Set dates for public hearings

#### **Public Comment**

The following individuals spoke during the public comment period:

- Allen Justice
- Casey Morehouse
- Mary Shirley Wilet
- Joe Brown
- Sonya Karber

#### **Past History**

Fred Yates, past VSDB-Staunton principal presented a brief history of the two schools.

#### **Presentation of Additional Data as well as Corrected Data**

Karen Trump made corrections to data that had previously been presented to Task Force members and shared additional information that had been requested by members at the previous meeting. Her comments are not summarized since all members received written copies. The following items were included in meeting packets:

- Placing school divisions – VSDBs
- An analysis of facilities’ conditions at both schools and their need for major, minor work or no work.
- Updated information on VSDB-Hampton facilities
- Virginia Relay brochure
- VSDB-Hampton employee and student ethnic status
- VSDB-Staunton employee and students ethnic status
- Enrollment at both schools – 1980-1981–2002-2003
- Vocational Rehabilitation Outcomes – Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program, Department of Rehabilitative Services
- Sign Communication Proficiency Interview, Center for ASL Literacy, Gallaudet University

In addition, she represented a “Data Summary” to members. She summarized the data that had been presented to members since the first meeting and followed each piece of information with one of the following questions: “What does it tell us?” or “Why is this important?” Written copies were given to members. The purpose of the summary was to focus the members’ deliberations into questions that would need to be addressed by the Task Force as they develop their plan of implementation (in accordance with the appropriations act language).

In the discussion that followed the presentation of the above information, Dr. Trump shared that she is often asked if students who are multi-disabled without the sensory disabilities can attend the schools. According to the Code of Virginia, they cannot.

### **Concerns regarding Public Involvement**

The public involvement activities were reviewed: public comment period at all meetings, Web-based mailbox on DOE’s website, focus groups, and proposed public hearings.

Members expressed a concern that those that will be impacted the most by the Task Force’s decisions may not be getting information. Dr. Trump reported that the Web mailbox had not received any comments. It was reported there was concern that the mailbox is hard to find on DOE’s website. Doug Cox indicated that his staff would review the situation and make an effort to have access to the mailbox displayed more appropriately on the website with easier access to it.

Members explored ways to promote the use of the mailbox. It was suggested that information be sent to key stakeholders/groups/individuals through the following means: the Handinet Listserv; the Northern Virginia Resource Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; the focus groups’ participant lists; parents, staff, and alumni of each school; military families; and itinerant teachers. Mary-Margaret Cash suggested that the minutes of the Task Force Meetings be posted on the Town Hall website. DOE staff indicated they would do so.

In addressing a question as to whether there is a listing of children/adults with sensory impairments “somewhere” so information could be sent to them, the Virginia Department

for the Blind and Visually Impaired stated they have a mailing list of 1938 children. The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing reported they have a mailing list with no identification of whether the person is a child or adult. David Young indicated he had contacted the military bases' family services centers and determined that there are 3,000 families in the Hampton Roads area who are classified as exceptional families but there is no designation of the child's disability classification.

**Additional Data Concerns and Information** (requested at previous meeting)

Nancy Armstrong reminded members that it is difficult to document the benefits of the residential program for students with sensory impairments; however, it is clear from observations and feedback from students, families and alumni that it is an important part of a student's socialization.

Glen Slonneger reported he is still gathering information on the vocational outcomes after graduation of students who have gone through employment training. There is interest in knowing the kinds of employment and rate of pay that the students are receiving.

Martha Adams reported there are 201 children being served in out-of-state placement for emotional disabilities through the Comprehensive Services Act program. There was no breakdown by disability but there were some with sensory disabilities and autism. She stated, on average, it costs \$220,000 per year per child for out-of-state care.

Doug Cox reported that there is state owned property at Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center that might be considered if the Task Force should decide to relocate both schools to a new site. There is also property at the University of Virginia, although they may have other plans for it and not willing to engage in discussions of uses by other state entities.

Mary Nunnally, Department of Rehabilitative Services, stated that employment data for outcomes for the deaf and hard of hearing data are not readily available. She did share the data that were specific to those that the agency assists. She distributed a handout so her comments are not summarized here.

**Task Force Membership**

David Young raised the issue of Task Force membership and the concern that because of health issues, Senator Maxwell had been unable to attend a meeting and had not sent a representative to attend in his place. It was agreed that Senator Hanger would make contact with Senator Maxwell and if he did not wish to appoint someone to represent him and his views to invite Delegate Mary Christian to join the Task Force. If Delegate Christian is agreeable to an appointment, Scott Goodman will contact the Speaker of the House to seek the appointment.

**Focus Group Update**

Judy Burtner reported that six focus groups had been completed. These groups consisted of the following: two groups of parents (Staunton and Hampton), two groups of personnel (Hampton and Staunton), one group of alumni, and a group of school special education

directors/administrators. Yet to be completed are two groups of alumni (Northern Virginia and Hampton) and a group of consumer organization representatives. One group of alumni and the consumer organization representatives had been scheduled in July but the groups had to be rescheduled due to the difficulty in obtaining interpreters. The three additional groups are scheduled August 14 (Hampton) and August 25 (Northern Virginia). Parents' groups requested the "raw" information (that recorded on newsprint in response to questions) be returned to them for additional comment once the information was typed. A decision was made to return all the comments to each group's participants for additional comments or clarification. The focus group report will be completed and forwarded to Task Force members prior to the August 27 meeting.

It was reported that the questions that are being asked of focus group participants include the effect that the proposed options may have on children and their families, additional options the Task Force should consider, the criteria they would suggest the Task Force use in making their decision and "what if" questions if any one of the proposed options are chosen.

### **Additional Options**

Judy Burtner reported that focus group participants had suggested several additional options when asked if there were other options the Task Force should consider. These included the following:

- Reorganize the special education structure so DOE would supervise all special education in the state, mainstreaming administration and removing competition for resources (parent)
- Give Title I designation to both schools (to relieve budget concerns (parent)
- Have regional/local divisions assume administrative functions with both schools remaining open (parent)
- Make each school or the school a local school division (special education director)
- Have school provide a yearlong program assuming responsibility for extended school year (ESY) (special education director)

Members reviewed the above options but declined to make any decision on them until all focus groups had been completed and a report prepared. However, they did comment on them. Doug Cox indicated that the option to reorganize the special education structure so DOE would supervise all special education in the state, mainstreaming administration and removing competition for resources would most likely be a constitutional issue. He emphasized that the DOE already supervises all special education in the state so this suggestion is not clear enough about the difference intended. The option to have the schools receive the Title 1 designation is presently being implemented. The third option of the regional/local divisions assume administrative functions with both schools remaining open would possibly deny a parent the opportunity to vote for the school board that administrates their child's school. The fourth option to make each school or the school a local school division would have constitutional implications related to funding. In addition, it was thought some of the above-proposed options were actually

implementation pieces of other options. Task Force members were asked to review all options that will be included in the focus group report and be prepared at the August 27 meeting to make decisions regarding the incorporation of them into the exiting list of options.

### **Criteria for Decision-Making**

Members reviewed the suggested criteria that had been suggested by focus group participants to be used by the Task Force for decision-making. These included:

1. The option addresses the best interests of the child (academic and social)
2. The option is cost-effective and addresses needed program changes for improvement
3. The proposed change provides the least negative impact on the child, family and current VSDB staff
4. The option is achievable within a short implementation time frame
5. The option supports programs that reflect “best practices” with regard to each disability area served and offers a variety of options including assistive technology evaluations and support.
6. The option provides nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities for all students
7. The option matches the requirements of the appropriation language:
  - An examination of appropriate academic programs
  - Staffing requirements
  - Facilities requirements
  - Student transportation requirements
  - Individual arrangements necessary for all students currently receiving services
  - The steps necessary to achieve consolidation
  - Funding requirements and/or savings
  - Alternative uses of facilities
  - A suggested timeline for achieving consolidation

Members decided criteria for decision-making would be helpful in making their decisions. However, they did not want to make a final decision on criteria until all the focus groups have been completed in case additional criteria is suggested by participants. Members did agree that the selected criteria needed to be measurable and objective to the extent possible. Also, that the above seventh item really represented the factors that would have to be considered in any option chosen.

In a three-round process, members proposed their own criteria. Points were given to each item. Three points were given to criteria suggested in round one, two points to criteria in the second round, and one point to criteria suggested in third round. Each member had ranked their suggested criteria before the rounds began. The results are as follows:

1. The plan is in the best interest of the child including the use of best practices, both academically and socially. (15 points)
2. The plan matches the appropriations language avoiding the pitfalls of past efforts to address issue (10 points)
3. The plan avoids duplication of services with one state operated residential school (9 points)
4. The plan has the least negative impact on the child, family, and staff (8 points)
5. The plan is cost effective with program changes (8 points)
6. The plan provides the best educational/vocational opportunity for HI and VI children (7 points)
7. The plan reduces the cost of the programs ultimately (3 points)
8. The plan include a state of the art program for the HI, VI, and multi-disabled children (3 points)
9. The plan provides educational options for the children including day and residential programs (2 points)
10. The plan considers the non-academic services such as maintenance of the facility (1 point)
11. The plan include comprehensive services from birth to 21 (1 point)
12. The plan serves the mission of education (1 point)

Discussion followed on what was meant by such terms as best interest of a child, best practices, duplication of services and cost. It was determined that the best interest of a child included a learning environment with appropriate communication tools and technology that would maximize a child's potential in education, vocational skills, daily living, and social skills tailoring skills work (i.e. Braille, and specific living skills) to the child.

Best practices was defined as being state of the art with maximum results using the most efficient way that is researched-based with measurable outcomes. It was thought that this should be considered as a function of management and may not always be in the best interest of the child.

Members did not define the duplication of costs but rather gave methods for considering what is appropriate. Points to be considered included reducing the dollar investment while increasing services, combining "backroom" services, increasing the critical mass (size) of students, considering the number of buildings that need to be maintained, recognizing that effective cost may not reduce the overall budget, and a look at other states to get a range of what is cost appropriate for a child while working for more "bang-for-the-buck" by combining programs with things like out-of-state and regional programs. The members decided they wanted to look at different ways to deliver services that increase the "bang-for-the-buck" including possibly adding additional children that are being sent out of state for services or receiving children from out-of-state programs.

Duplication of services includes the "backroom" costs and building maintenance. Members were also asked to consider if both programs can be done on one campus or

which is best, having a few children on both campuses or having a critical mass on one campus.

Members decided they would explore criteria further at the August 27 meeting and make a decision on the criteria to be used to narrow the list of options for consolidation.

**Agenda – August 27 Meeting – VSDB- Staunton, 9:30 a.m. -4:00 p.m.**

(Not necessarily in this order)

- 30-minute public comment period - each person limited to 3 minutes.
- Tour of facilities – one hour
- PowerPoint presentation on the facility to be given during lunch of the facility at Staunton
- Report – vocational outcomes being researched by Glen Slonneger\_\_
- Report - Focus Groups Findings\*
- Report – Public Comment Summary (mailbox)
- Agreement on criteria for decision-making
- Review of Options – narrow the list
- Agreement - Report Format\*

\* Members asked that these reports/forms be sent ahead of time so they can be reviewed prior to the meeting.

**Future Meeting Schedule**

The need for additional meetings of the Task Force was discussed. Two separate schedules were prepared one for the deadline of November 1 and another for December 1 (if the deadline can be extended). They are as follows:

Deadline of December 1

August 27, 2003, 9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Staunton

October 2, 2003, 10:00 a.m. –3:00 p.m. – Hampton – tour facilities and select an option, develop components (per appropriations language)

October 7, 2003 – Richmond or Goochland – (if needed) – continue development of plan and preparation of report for public comment

October 14 & 16 – Public Hearings in the evenings – Roanoke and Williamsburg

October 30, 2003 – Richmond – approve final plan

November 15, 2003 – completion of plan by DOE staff (not a scheduled meeting data)

Deadline of November 1

August 27, 2003, 9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Staunton

October 2, 2003, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. – Hampton – tour facilities and select an option, develop components (per appropriations language)

October 7, 2003 – Richmond or Goochland – (if needed) – continue development of plan and preparation of report for public comment

October 14 & 16 – Public Hearings in the evenings – Roanoke and Williamsburg

October 23, 2003 – Charlottesville - approve final plan

November 1, 2003 – completion of plan by DOE staff (not a scheduled meeting data)

Prepared by Kathryn Burruss and Judy Burtner  
8/09/03